African novelists like Ngugi and Achebe, endeavour to transform African novel from a political, sociological or historical and anthropological work to a work of art. Their distinct technique of narration using native devices to shape, explore, define and finally evaluate Africans about Africanness and African experience in African situation, attracted also the Western eye. The novelist tries to classify and order the chaos of experience and analyse the nature of man in the given situation.

The primary concern of Ngugi's novels is well-being of the society in Kenya. The novels explore the themes like political emancipation, economic development, cultural identity and demand for high ethical standard for possible reconciliation between tradition and the more liberal elements of the emerging creed in Kenya through proper education. The novels record, through the lives of individuals and communities, the processes by which these ideals could be achieved. The protagonists of the novels are put to test of their manhood, sometimes unpredictable, subjected to psychological imbalance, with many aspirations only to face challenges in life, whatever be the fate of the individuals, the novels pay a tribute to the intellect and moral courage of the central figures surviving the hardships and sacrifices in pursuit of their goals.
Sometimes they become victims of their situations and circumstances fighting the external forces around them like Joshua, Munira, Wanja, and Abdulla. But some like Kabonyi, Jacobo, Robson, Karanja, Kimeria, Chui, Nderi wa Riera are presented as deficient in humanity and responsible for the setbacks of the society. In *The River Between* his central characters like Joshua, and Kabonyi potential leaders of a new society are put to scrutiny by his standards—Joshua and Kabonyi fail all the tests and even Waiyaki is not successful with his inadequacies. When Waiyaki blames himself for having abandoned his chosen task of re-unification, Ngugi at the human level sympathises with him, extending fellow-feeling to him, but at the social level he represents clearly his failure as total, though simple. Waiyaki, though a man of calibre, has failed for his lack of insight and foresight and partial vision of the gravity of the situation and repercussions affecting the entire tribe.

Ngugi apart from contemporary life stories, also made ample use of Gikuyu legends and myths. Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya*, the first book to give comprehensive versions of the legends and myths, the traditional political institutions and the religious beliefs of the Gikuyu, narrating the legacy of the past and the history of the ancestors to be continued in the progeny, inspired many a novelist, also Ngugi. The well-known Gikuyu legend, of
Bikuyu and Mumbi, the mythical founders of the tribe, which attained anti-colonial significance during the Mau Mau revolt, became a rallying cry for political freedom from the British when the arrested Gikuyu gave their identity as 'children of Gikuyu and Mumbi'. In *The River Between* Chege tells of this legend to Waiyaki, his son, future leader of the tribe. Another myth, the story of great seer Mugo Wa Kibiro, who prophesied the arrival of the stranger whose dress as Kenyatta describes 'would resemble the wings of butterflies and who would later bring an iron snake.... and who would carry magical sticks', has a direct bearing on the plot and the main theme of the novel *The River Between*. Ngugi tells of this prophecy in short and adding something his own:

"Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows in me, I say from the same tree, a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people".  

Waiyaki in the novel is the direct descendant of the famous seer and is called upon to fulfil this prophecy. The village Kameno is the home of Mugo Wa Kibiro, which attains symbolic national meaning as is at the centre of Gikuyu land and representing the fate of the nation. But

ironically Waiyaki faces his tragic end when rejected by his own tribe, and when his personal commitment to the very unity of the community is overpowered by his personal passion, leaving the question of leadership open in the end. The novel doesn't propose to solve unanswered questions but to query the real questions behind the much discussed topics. Ngugi himself suggests similar quest at the heart of his writings:

"my writing is really an attempt to understand myself and my situation in society and history".  

The River Between, the first Kenyan novel, is Ngugi's new literary medium to express the rethinking of historical topics in subjective terms simplifying historical events of distinct periods—early evangelization around 1900 and the independent education movement around 1930—making it a novel not of leadership or education, but of a protagonist longing to lead his life against the tide of his time. Ngugi presents a community maintaining its traditional solidarity of family, clan and tribe, that would favour the hero that tries to derive his strength from being close to his people.

There is a strong patterning in the novel clarifying its interrelated themes. The image linking the

two ridges together with the river Honia dividing and uniting people of the same community is fundamental, suggestive and pervading in the novel. The ridges adopt a symbolic life of their own: Waiyaki sees them 'glaring at one another menacingly' and later he says enthusiastically of their vigour at the first parents meeting, "He had awakened the sleeping lions. They would now roar, roar to victory." And at the end of the novel the river still flows enigmatically as the repository of so many unresolved possibilities: "And Honia river went on flowing through the valley of life, throbbing murmuring an unknown song." It is not only the imagery of the ridges and the river that creates a sense of pattern and unity in *The River Between* but also the sacred grove and the journey that Chege and Waiyaki make together, that is constantly remembered and alluded to throughout the novel.

Like *The River Between*, *Weep Not, Child* is intensely concentrated epitomising a crucial and complex phase in Gikuyu, Kenyan experience. It is a 'novel' challenge to the Kenyan youth to identify the potential positive elements in their heritage. Njoroge symbolises the Kenyan youth accepting the responsibility of constructing 'new Kenyan' on the sacrifices and achievements of Boros,

Nyokabis and Njeris. Ngotho symbolically represents his age group that lacked foresight and determination and that succumbed to colonial elitist appropriation of the land.

_Weep Not, Child_ also offers, like his earlier novel both a subtle portrayal of particular human dilemmas and conflicts and a dramatic social commentary. In the despair and failings a fear of the future we find not only the uncertainties and ironies inherent in the situation between 1956 and 1962 expressed truthfully in the novel, but also a provocative challenge to the reader and Kenyan in particular. Boro is an indomitable fighter for social principles, living negatively, destructively for revenge. The harsh dimensions of the Mau Mau struggle find expression in the injured psyche of Boro. But Njoroge had always been a dreamer, a visionary, who consoled himself faced by the difficulties of the moment by a look at a better to come.

The life of Njoroge—as transformed from an innocent school boy to a victim of the Mau Mau war—narrated in a series of incidents in symbolic of the life of every Kenyan youth during the political struggle for freedom. Ngugi himself said 'I lived through the period myself'. This becomes the backdrop for Ngugi to give a call for all Kenyans and Africans 'Black people must rise up and fight'. Through the powerful impact of missionary education with its attractions—wealth, status and power—on the youth and
others, Ngugi seems to say that a rigidly conservative approach to schooling is not the solution to the problems of Kenyan and that revolution against prevailing conditions alone help in rebuilding the society. Ngugi also firmly advocates a revolutionary path also in Devil on the Cross (1986) his fifth novel, as the only option left for Kenyans to form a socialistic society. He changed his medium to Sikuyu to effectively convey his message to the peasants and workers. In this novel the confrontation is not with alien culture but with the present charged with a 'historic sense' through introspection. In Weep Not, Child, with human milieu forming the background, Ngugi successfully explored the issue of alienation to present the cultural perspective of the country incorporating the socio-economic implications of the new systems in the given political situation.

In Ngugi’s third novel A Grain of Wheat (1967) the influence of Frantz Fanon is evident in the presentation of the characters and the pervading main theme 'living with cowardice', among the little people the average villagers, as well. Some find its theme to be not betrayal and disillusionment, but rebirth and regeneration. The novel is also concerned about the Mau Mau campaign with its historical setting as in his other earlier novels, leading to independence, betrayal, and a thorough examination of heroism and treachery. Ngugi has made this novel not merely a social document but a social force aiming to justify the complex patterning of time sequence juxtaposing different
scenes, establishing the connection between cause and effect, action and responsibility. To concretize his theme, Ngugi has used the Christian myth imaginatively and creatively which forms the basic framework of the story to offer his own interpretation of Christianity. Kihika, Mugo, Gikonyo and Mumbi use Christian concepts to express their dreams and aspirations, their lapses and fears. The central message of the novel is profoundly Christian—the duty of each man and each society to work out its own salvation. The regeneration concept is applicable to the individual and society as well. Personal salvation is visualized as the end of alienation and return to community through self-discovery, which involves acceptance of responsibility as a human being and a willingness to be honest with oneself. Kihika and Karanja provide the moral polarities in the novel. And the drama of spiritual struggle is enacted in the development of Mugo, a highly complex character, sensitive, thoughtful, imaginative, but also a nervous and restive soul personifying the tensions and agonies of a troubled land.

From the point of his Christian vision and Christian myths used, the novel tends to gain spiritual dimension. Ngugi is more concerned with moral and spiritual freedom without which he thinks political freedom has little meaning. Through the metaphor of rebirth he emphasizes the attainment of spiritual freedom, that would bring about the
end of self-alienation and restore people to a perfect community based on fellowship and love, in the promised land of Canaan. The interdependence of personal and social salvation is symbolised in the reunion of Bikonyo with Mumbi that visualize the birth of a new Kenya. There is a change in the attitude of Ngugi towards history making him firmly believe that the success of social revolution is inevitable in course of time. And the final message of A Grain of Wheat appears to be not unmitigated suffering and frustration but challenge and hope. The shift in the tone of Ngugi can be noticed from his belief in the success of the struggle for a juster society which is but part of inevitable historical progression, as evident in the novel by Mugo’s final action symbolizing life-renewing processes at work in the individual and the community as a whole.

Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, socially conscious of the situation in Kenya under the impact of the West and the political turmoil, as a committed writer endeavours in his works for the emancipation and upliftment of the peasant and working communities in Kenya. Opposing the legacy of colonialism, Ngugi changed his medium to Bikuyu to effectively convey his message and to educate common people to become conscious of their social status and know the importance of their sweat and blood and their role in rebuilding Kenya after achieving political freedom. Nqaahika Ndeenda and Caitaani Mutharaba – ini originally written in
Gikuyu, Ngugi himself translated into English as The Trial of Dedan Kimathi, a play and Petals of Blood, a novel, respectively.

Under the influence of radical socialist thinking and Marxist theory and others like Frantz Fanon that influenced his early writings, Ngugi chose to define in Kenyan context and vehemently discuss concepts like people's government, power of the proletariat, mass controlled means of production and egalitarian social status within the fictional framework.

Rejecting the possibility of reconstruction of African society on old colonial foundations Ngugi presents in his works a new order of reality as to make a fresh beginning, to create new systems to govern the 'new' egalitarian society.

Ngugi believes in the adequacy and effective use of African languages for truthful and meaningful communication of the ongoing reality of the prevailing situation and human predicament in Africa. For him the use of foreign language is but self-colonisation leading to self-alienation within the native society. So Ngugi has started writing in the Bikuyu language to become closer to his people and for direct communication with the masses, a new challenge for African writer. He asserts that in choosing a language for imaginative expression 'Kenyan
writers should remember that the struggle of Kenyan national languages against domination by foreign languages is part of the wider historical struggle of the Kenyan national culture against imperialist domination.

To suit his purpose and native audience, Ngugi chooses simple African English idiom but using the subtlety and resourcefulness of the English language, for African expressions and flavour. "His structures are very varied and highly concentrated. His diction is at once spontaneous and exact".5

Compared with the two earlier novels, the language used is less ambiguous, more refined and subtle in A Grain of Wheat in presenting its complex plot with intricacies of native religion and Christian theology. Petals of Blood is further complex from the point of view language and its varied style of expression but that does not hinder its popularity. Devil on the Cross originally written in Gikuyu "retains certain traditional and informal features of style"6, using pithy and powerful sentences, such as 'He felt guilty', 'I found it', 'Njoroge was pleased'. But he used long sentences in The River between.

The use of direct speech, in the form of short dialogues in the novels is impressive. For instance in *The River Between* the conversation between mother and son—

"'Mother, you must tell me all those stories again', he implored as he knelt down to help in spite of her rejection of his offer.

'Hmmm', she murmured as she blew some rubbish away from the seeds she had in her hands. She paused for a moment and smiled.

'You cunning young man. Is that why you offered to help, eh?','*

The prose in *Devil on the Cross* is:

"gently but firmly patterned, bound together by balances, repetitions, parallels, contrasts: of word, of phrase and clause, of sentence and paragraph".  

*The River Between* has symbolic significance with characters used as symbols representing various sections of the society and systems and vision of life in the given

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situation. In *Devil on the Cross* the Gikuyu proverbs add richness of the language in giving native flavour to the novel.

The influence of the Bible is evident in Chege's efforts to inspire Waiyaki through his heritage in *The River Between*:

"... it was before Agu; in the beginning of things. Murungu brought the man and woman here and again showed them the whole vastness of the land. He gave the country to them and their children and the children of the children, 'tene na tene,' world without end".  

Ngugi delved deep into his native tradition and used native myths and history of Gikuyuland and of Ilmorog in his fiction. In *The River Between* the river Honia signifies many things.

Some of the chapters open with the description of landscapes of Gikuyuland evoking native atmosphere and native life.

"The women and men of Makuyu were already up and about their morning chores by the time the two

girls with their water-barrels weighing heavily on their backs, reached home." 10

And also in the passage:

"There was mist everywhere. It covered Kameno, Makuyu and other ridges in its thin white greyness. It was chilling, chilling the skin." 11

And in Weep Not, Child: "And Jesus answered and said unto them: Take heed that no man deceive you." 12

But this influence of the Bible is not very deep.

Ngugi's conversation with a prison Chaplain tells us much of his inner frame of mind:

"'Hold it!' I cried out. 'Who needs your prayers, your Bibles, your leaves of holiness—all manufactured and packed in America? Why do you always preach humility and acceptance of sins to the victims of oppression? ... Have you read 'Nqaahika Ndeenda'? Did you ever go to see the play? What was wrong with it? Tell me! What was wrong with Kamiriithu peasants and workers wanting

11. Ibid, P.45.
to change their lives through their own collective efforts instead of always being made passive recipients of Harambee charity meant to buy peace and sleep for uneasy heads." 13.

Devil on the Cross became popular in Kenya for its use of oral literature, the traces of which are evident in its biting satire and ribaldry. Native songs, dances, rituals and celebrations create atmosphere suitable to the historical setting in the novel, and the story as narrated by a village musician.

The climax of Devil on the Cross is the assassination of a Rich Old Man by Wariinga, sending signals not only to the oppressors in Kenyan and Africa but also to all exploiters everywhere.

In A Grain of Wheat there is an element of suspense and drama culminating in the final scene of the novel. In Petals of Blood the story is structured on the line of a detective novel packed with emotion, tension and excitement. The plot opens with the questioning of several individuals involved in a sensational crime. The suspense hangs around until the detective manages the unforeseen culprit into a dramatic confession. But this thrilling investigation only leads to:

"presenting a sad, contemplative analysis of the contemporary social scene, however desperately, streaked with hope, and complicated by layer upon layer of irony." 14.

Ngugi's novels have attracted the readers outside Kenya despite their being autobiographical, historical and pure religious novels, and not totally Western. Though there are certain uncertainties and imperfections in the use of the novel form, there is a good deal of merit in their own right, making Ngugi a powerful and pioneer African-Kenyan novelist to reckon with.